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The Leipzig Model and Its Consequences: Niels W. Gade and Carl Nielsen as European National Composers[1]

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Abstract: The article discusses how the concept of "national composer" was established and developed in Central and Northern Europe by looking into the attempted international careers of two Danish composers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analysis focuses on the appropriation of national composers in relation to international recognition in order to reflect on how this changing relationship might have influenced the conditions for international recognition of Zoltán Kodály. In the 1840s, Leipzig was the place to obtain international reputation. It was in Leipzig that Niels W. Gade was first recognized as a composer with a "Nordic tone" and it was because of that, that he had a meteoric career and was ranked as an important European composer. In the early twentieth century, Carl Nielsen replaced Gade as the most revered Danish composer; however, at that time, being a national composer was not an advantage to an international career, it was an obstacle, if anything.

Keywords: national music, music historiography, Gade, Nielsen, Kodály, Bartók

The concept of "national composer" originated in the modern national movements of the nineteenth century and had its first heyday during the 1840s. In these years, Leipzig was the center of musical life in Northern Europe and with the establishment of the Leipzig Conservatory (1843) the so-called Leipzig model was in place. It was a model for structuring musical life in a certain way, based on the combination of a first-rank orchestra, a conservatory, a vivid musical life and

1. This article is the revised version of a paper given at the conference *A National Master in International Context. International Musicological Conference on the 50th Anniversary of Zoltán Kodály's Death,* Budapest, 8–10 December 2017.

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the presence of internationally recognized composers and critics with access to the most prestigious music journals. Due to this unique combination of a musical center of international rank, a center of musical education, and a hotspot for musical journals, this model had a huge impact on how musical life was structured in Central and Northern Europe, and aesthetic views and values came along with the institutions organized according to this model. One of those aesthetic ideas was a concept of national music. In this article, I discuss how the concept of national composers was established and developed in Central and Northern Europe by looking into the international career attempts of two Danish composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My analysis will focus on the appropriation of "national" composers in relation to "international" recognition in order to reflect on how this changing relationship might have influenced the conditions for international recognition of Zoltán Kodály.

The theme of the conference *A National Master in International Context* marking the 50th anniversary of Kodály's death in 1967 seemed to be based on the notion that he ought to be recognized internationally on a higher level and that it is unjustified that he is not. The fact that he is a national master is not questioned and I would not argue that it should be so. Thus, it seems, a large effort is needed on his behalf to make an international audience understand his music and its Hungarian context: specialized musicologists have the task of informing the rest of the world of this national context, and hopefully the audience will then understand and recognize him. Is such a strategy going to work?

I will to pose the underlying question: Why is it so difficult to be recognized internationally as a "national master"? Was this always the case or did the status of national composers change from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries? In what way was the identification as "national" marked as a positive or negative factor in the process of gaining recognition internationally? I will start out with a comparative analysis of how two recognized Danish "national masters," Niels W. Gade (1817–1890) and Carl Nielsen (1865–1831), were perceived outside of Denmark and how the status of being "national" inflected their international careers. At the end I will return to the question of how the reception of Kodály might gain or lose from such perceptions.

My argument may be summarized in this way: in the 1840s, Leipzig was the place to obtain international reputation. It was in Leipzig that Niels W. Gade was first recognized as a composer with a "Nordic tone" and it was *because* of that, that he had a meteoric career and was ranked as an important European composer. In the early twentieth century, Carl Nielsen replaced Gade as the most revered Danish composer. But at that time, being a national composer was not an advantage to an international career; it was an obstacle, if anything.

The significance of the "Leipzig model"

What I refer to as the "Leipzig model," a concept worked out in detail by Yvonne Wasserloos, is the institutionalized structure of the musical life in Leipzig as it was formed in the 1840s, including concrete institutions like the Conservatory and the Gewandhaus Orchestra, the structure and repertoires of concert life, the organization of teaching and curricula, and the whole mind-set around how to handle and think about music. Her conclusion is that this Leipzig model, due to the status of the city and its musical life, became the model for how to structure musical life in Northern, Eastern, and Central Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century.[2] If one combines this with the observation that this model was formed at that exact historical moment when the idea of national music became a new hegemonic European idea, one will have the ground on which a "national" composer could reach international fame. Although modern ideas of the nation and the *Volk* were established as early as the late eighteenth century by Herder and others, the 1840s was the decade that saw the national (cultural) movements in Europe reach a first pinnacle.[3]

Leipzig was at the core of these movements when it came to music. Leipzig had, as a town with no residential court, based its reputation on trade and printing and publishing houses, not least within the field of music. It was a town with a rich musical tradition going back to Telemann and Bach, and in 1835 Mendelssohn took over the position as director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra and turned it into one of the leading symphonic orchestras in the world. In 1843, he founded the Leipzig Conservatory, which became the model for a large number of European conservatories.

The significance of the Leipzig model is evident from the fact that, from 1843 to 1880, 41 per cent of the students in Leipzig came from outside of Germany, adding up to 1,359 foreign students. Of those, 413 came from the United States, 337 from Great Britain and 140 from Scandinavia. Russia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Poland, and Austria came next, and only 90 students came from other European countries.[4] One should add that these numbers only include students officially enrolled at the Leipzig Conservatory. A large number of musicians and composers went on study trips to Leipzig as private pupils of teachers employed at the Conservatory. There seems to be a fairly strict dividing line of influence between a Leipzig-influenced Northern, Eastern, and Central Europe also including

2. Yvonne Wasserloos, *Das Leipziger Konservatorium der Musik im 19. Jahrhundert. Anziehungs- und Ausstrahlungskraft eines musikpädagogischen Modells auf das internationale Musikleben* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2004).

3. Cf. Miroslav Hroch, *Das Europa der Nationen. Die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) (= *Synthesen. Probleme europäischer Geschichte,* 2) 109–234.

4. Wasserloos, *Das Leipziger Konservatorium,* 66–69.

the United States, and a Western and Southern European sphere, where France and Italy provided the model for the organization of musical life and education.[5]

The immense influence of the Leipzig model is based on the fact that most foreign students in Leipzig eventually returned to their home countries and – by virtue of their experience and formation – they often became leading figures in the local musical life. The implication in a not yet unified Germany was of a similar kind, as a large number of students educated in Leipzig obtained similar positions in other German cities. From 1865 onward at least 40 former students from Leipzig became founding fathers of conservatories in Central and Northern Europe, and the United States, and a similar number of former students founded orchestras and music societies.[6] Gade, for example, became in 1850 conductor of the Music Society (Musikforeningen), the previously reorganized leading concert institution in Copenhagen, and "was now able to be for the musical life in Copenhagen what Mendelssohn had been in Leipzig". In 1867, he co-founded the Copenhagen Conservatory remaining its director for the rest of his life.[7]

Musical life in a large part of Europe was structured in ways similar to those in Leipzig. And another significant impact was that the curriculum at the Leipzig Conservatory with its emphasis on music theory (with Bach in high esteem) joined ranks with the aesthetics of the followers of Mendelssohn and Schumann into what is referred to as the Leipzig school. In this line of thought, the emphasis on the characteristic national tone as a significant quality was propagated from the 1840s onwards. In other words, Leipzig became the place to learn how to recognize a national composer.

Recognizing a "Nordic tone": Niels W. Gade

The first case to be presented is that of Niels W. Gade who had a meteoric career and was ranked as an important European composer *because* the Leipzig school promoted him internationally as a national composer. When his early work, the overture *Reminiscences of Ossian* op. 1, had its first performance in Copenhagen on 19 November 1841, no one noticed a "Nordic" tone.[8] But then it was premiered in Leipzig in 1842, and that event was to be the first time a significant "Nordic tone" was recognized in Gade's symphonic music. Ossian was allegedly a Scottish bard from the third century whose poetry was translated by James Macpherson

5. For a broader history of musical education, see *Musical Education in Europe (1770–1914). Compositional, Institutional, and Political Challenges,* eds. Michael Fend and Michel Noiray (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005).

6. Wasserloos, *Das Leipziger Konservatorium,* 79–81.

7. Inger Sørensen, *Niels W. Gade. Et dansk verdensnavn* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2002), 144–148, 199–201, quote on 148.

8. Sørensen, *Niels W. Gade,* 43.

in the 1760s. We now know that this tale was invented by Macpherson, but at that time he was widely believed. In the following year, when Gade's symphony no. 1 (after *Kjæmpeviser*) was performed in Leipzig in early 1843, Gade was enthusiastically greeted as a "Nordic" composer by German critics – Robert Schumann being the most prominent of them. This is a well-known story but it is of interest to ask why. At least two things made this unexpected success possible. First, a discourse on "the North" had already been installed in German intellectual life through literature and philosophy, and second, the idea of national music was strongly favored.[9] In fact, it seemed as though the Leipzig critics were just waiting for someone like Gade to appear.

These works by Gade had, on the one hand, affinities with Mendelssohn's overture *The Hebrides* (or *Fingal's Cave,* 1830) and his *Scottish Symphony* (laid out in 1830 and finished in 1842) as well as with the Lied-based beginning of Schubert's symphony no. 9 in C major which was first performed in 1839. On the other hand, Gade used folksong-like themes. The second theme in his overture very much resembles an actual folksong, *Ramund var sig en bedre mand,* and Gade claimed to have based his symphony upon "Kjæmpeviser," literally songs of giants, an expression used to signify ancient folk songs. Actually, what he used as his main theme was a folksong-like melody that he himself had composed a few years earlier called *Kong Valdemar's Jagt* (King Valdemar's Hunt). The "Nordic" tone was perceived in "the dark, misty tone [which] vividly resembles the Nordic legends and ballads,"[10] in the character of folk songs and especially in those places where brass scoring combined with *arpeggio* figures reminded the critics of bards striking their harps before battle. That Gade composed in that particular way was not a pure coincidence, as he had studied in Copenhagen with the composer and folksong collector Andreas Peter Berggreen who propagated ideas essentially related to Nordic folk songs. One could claim that the use of *Kong Valdemar's Jagt,* which was originally composed for a collection of songs to texts from Danish national history, also edited by Berggreen in 1840, fits Berggreen's program well.[11] So, *the idea* of national music was already present in the musical culture before the works of classical music, that would come to embody this idea, were composed.

9. Michael Matter, *Niels W. Gade und der "nordische Ton." Ein musikgeschichtlicher Präzendenzfall* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2015) (= *Schweizer Beiträge zur Musikforschung,* Bd. 21), 25–97.

10. "Der düstere, nebelhafte Ton in dem Werke erinnert lebhaft an die nordischen Sagen und Balladen …" in "Z.," "Fünfzehntes Abonnementconcert, d. 27. Januar" [Nachklänge aus Ossian. Ouverture von N. W. Gade], *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 16/17 (25. Februar 1842), 68, quoted in Matter, *Niels W. Gade,* 26.

11. For a historical account of the notion of "Nordic" sound, see Michael Fjeldsøe and Sanne Krogh Groth, "'Nordicness' in Scandinavian Music – A Complex Question'," in Tim Howell (ed.), *The Nature of Nordic Music* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, forthcoming), and in a Danish context, Jens Henrik Koudal, "Musikken. På sporet af 'originale nationaltoner'," in *Veje til danskheden. Bidrag til den moderne nationale selvforståelse,* ed. Palle Ove Christiansen (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2005), 95–123.

The significance of this first case study of Niels W. Gade is that he was promoted internationally through the Leipzig journals as a Nordic or Danish composer, and that his music would be played not only in his home country but throughout nineteenth-century Europe, especially in German cities where musical life was based on the Leipzig model and mind-set. Thus, Gade became one of the most performed foreign composers in Germany during the rest of his lifetime; he was appointed teacher at the Leipzig Conservatory, becoming Mendelssohn's substitute in 1844 and his successor as conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1847. In fact, this is an amazing career for a young man with hardly any training as a conductor before arriving in Leipzig in 1843. At this point, being a national composer was an advantage for an international career.

Nationalizing music and music historiography

During the second half of the nineteenth century, conditions for being a national composer changed. It was an era of nation-building all over Europe, either as a successful establishment of unified nation-states based on a single nationality (like the united German state of 1871) or as a cultural and intellectual movement striving to achieve such a goal. It was also the era of establishing musicology as a professional line of scholarship. This meant that music historiography was based on the combined ideas of historicism and nationalism, and a core task was to contribute to the nation building with descriptions of each nation's music history. The basic assumption that music was to be ascribed to a nation and that the nation was the natural framework for narratives of music history was taken for self-evident.

This process of what I refer to as "nationalizing music and music historiography" was of great consequence for the way one thought about musical exchange. What in the 1840s was perceived as a relationship between musical centers, Leipzig – Copenhagen (or Leipzig – Budapest), would in the 1890s be thought of as a relationship between nations: Germany versus Denmark. With this change of perception, the notion of a center–periphery model was intensified. Instead of a relationship based on cultural status of cities, it became a relationship based on political power and the pure size of nations. This model of thought has rightly been criticized for being Germanocentric and for establishing a discourse within which German music is spoken of as universal contrary to the "national" musics of the peripheral states. There is music, like Bach and Beethoven, and there is national music, like Nielsen or Kodály. The consequence was that the position of the national composer was strengthened within each nation but was becoming of less interest to audiences of other nations. Instead of representing a European idea of national music it came to represent a specific nation with which other audiences had difficulties to identify. It became somebody else's music and read through

national lenses it might stir exotic arousal but would not form a common point of immediacy and identification for audiences across borders.

From my point of view, the critique of Germanocentrism is not even the most important consequence of this nationalization of music historiography and musical discourses. Besides turning some nations into periphery it makes us believe that unified nations are the basic unit of music historiography. Rather, I would claim that *the basic idea of "national" musics is an ideology which obscures the reality of how musical life actually works*. Instead of the musical centers connected with other musical centers in a network, which is the reality of musical life, it makes us believe that it is in fact a nation competing with another nation. And that perception makes it even more difficult for the music of smaller nations to achieve recognition internationally.

Carl Nielsen on the verge of international recognition

The protagonist of my second case study, Carl Nielsen, was to become a Danish national composer during the first two decades of the twentieth century. After reaching the age of forty, he achieved recognition as a national master and around the First World War he inherited the position formerly owned by Gade as the first among Danish composers. However, he was striving for international recognition as well, and in 1923 he seemed to have reached a point where one might think that he had achieved his goal. At last, international success was at hand. His music was played at on numerous occasions in Germany and Vienna, and he wrote to his wife on 5 March 1923 from Karlsruhe, after the last rehearsal for a concert:

> The orchestra is quite outstanding, and the musicians are so enthusiastic that they would go through fire and ice for me, both as a conductor and as a composer. Isn't it strange that now finally my cause and my life's work are so appreciated, so that I now stand here absolutely aimless.[12]

A few days later, he received the news that he had been appointed an ordinary, foreign member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. In 1923, five new members were appointed to the music section of this prestigious body, two of whom were local (Ferruccio Busoni and Franz Schreker), and three were from abroad (in the sense that they did not live in Prussia): Alexander Glazunov from Russia, Werner Braunfels from Munich, and Nielsen from Copenhagen. This happened two years after Jean Sibelius joined the Academy, but four respectively five years earlier than Schoenberg and Stravinsky, who became members in 1927 and 1928. In the end,

12. *Carl Nielsen. Selected Letters and Diaries,* eds. David Fanning and Michelle Assay (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2017), 555.

however, Nielsen did not overcome the barrier to obtain an international reputation at the time. He remained a major national composer, and despite some of his music from the 1920s, which would easily fit to be labelled as modernist or avant-garde, he was not recognized internationally as a modernist composer either.

In comparison, Béla Bartók achieved international recognition as a modernist composer due to being signed by Universal Edition and being promoted internationally around 1920 which helped him to be more than a national composer.[13] He became an internationally recognized composer from Hungary instead of just a Hungarian national composer (which he was, of course, as well and a celebrated one, too). In his Danish reception of the early 1920s it was clearly the image of the international, modernist Bartók that was reflected; around 1930, he was perceived as a composer whose music was based on original folk music. This was a distinct change of discourse, at times to the degree that the same piece (*Allegro barbaro,* for example) was described quite differently by the same reviewer within a timespan of just a few years.[14]

* * *

Since the late nineteenth century, the national discourse in music historiography has become the "natural" and rarely disputed way of thinking and talking about music. Albeit challenged within the academia, reading program notes and CD liners confirms that this is still the case within the musical culture of classical music. The predominant way of talking about composers and their music is still based in a discourse where music is related to a specific nation and it is taken for granted that it is an adequate categorization in order to "understand the music." This might be the reason why a composer like Kodály faces similar challenges as Nielsen did in the early twentieth century. Within a discourse of nationalized music and music historiography, where the concept of competing nations has marginalized smaller nations, it was and is no longer, as was the case in the 1840s, an advantage to be labelled a national master. Instead of being of significance to an international audience *because* one was an important European national composer (like in the case of the young Gade), the reputation of being a national composer has become a hindrance to reach the highest level of international recognition: that of being just "music" such as in the case of Beethoven, Stravinsky, or Bartók.

13. Malcolm Gillies, "The Canonization of Béla Bartók," in *Bartók Perspectives. Man, Composer, and Ethnomusicologist,* Elliot Antokoletz et alii (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 289–291.

14. Michael Fjeldsøe, "Different Images: A Case Study of Bartók Reception in Denmark," *Studia Musicologica* 47/3–4 (September 2006), 453–466.